

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### **Saint-Gobain Abrasives, Inc.**

#### **North Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership**

#### **Saint-Gobain Abrasives Wins Regional Manufacturing Leadership Award**

##### **Client Profile:**

Saint-Gobain Abrasives, a division of Compagnie de Saint-Gobain, is the world's leading manufacturer and distributor of abrasives products and systems. In the company's 35,000 square foot facility in Arden, North Carolina, 80 employees manufacture stationary diamond tools and rotary dressers for customers worldwide. It is the largest stationary diamond tool manufacturer in North America.

##### **Situation:**

To increase its competitiveness in the global marketplace, Saint-Gobain Abrasives began investigating lean manufacturing practices as a way to increase efficiency and productivity. The plant manager took a class offered by the Industrial Extension Service at North Carolina State University (IES), a NIST MEP network affiliate, and saw that lean is a practical, common sense approach that doesn't require a large capital investment to implement. He became excited about lean's potential and decided to try it. Saint-Gobain Abrasives asked IES to lead its implementation process.

##### **Solution:**

IES conducted a series of lean events for Saint-Gobain Abrasives through 2003. First it offered Lean 101 workshops to the company's employees to teach them the philosophy of lean manufacturing and the basic implementation concepts. Then IES led a core group of Saint-Gobain employees through a value stream mapping exercise, in which every step of the manufacturing process is documented and analyzed to discover inefficiencies and bottlenecks. After targeting key areas for improvement, IES helped the company develop an action plan to address problems. Finally, IES led a kaizen implementation event to put the action plan into practice.

The dramatic improvements resulting from the company's lean transformation earned Saint-Gobain the regional Manufacturing Leadership Award for a medium-sized business.

##### **Results:**

- \* Won the regional Manufacturing Leadership Award for a medium-sized business.
- \* Reduced cycle times by 87 percent.
- \* Improved on-time delivery from 92 percent to 99 percent.

##### **Testimonial:**

"I've been at this plant for 25 years, and have seen programs come and go, programs that were supposed to be "the greatest." So I wondered how employees would perceive this [project with the Industrial Extension Service]. But once we completed our first event, we embraced the lean concepts. Our employees see the value, they see it works, and they see the results. It's a good, sound approach. One of my favorite memories is having one employee who had really resisted the initial change tell me that this was the best thing management had ever done."

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Bob Owen, Plant Manager